

**JOHN CROWNE, HIS
LIFE AND
DRAMATIC WORKS**

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ARTHUR FRANKLIN WHITE

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HIS LIFE AND DRAMATIC WORKS

BY
ARTHUR FRANKLIN WHITE, Ph. D.

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PREFACE

It has been my aim in the following pages to give an account of the life and dramatic works of the now little known and less studied Restoration playwright, John Crowne. During the first half of the eighteenth century his name was kept alive by the retention of his best comedy, *Sir Courtly Nice*, in the repertory of the two theatres, but it was not until 1873 that his dramas were accessible to the general public in any form other than the original quartos and the few reprints of his more successful plays. In that year, however, James Maidment and W. H. Logan began the publication of his dramas in four volumes for the series known as "Dramatists of the Restoration". They prefaced their work with a short memoir, and prefixed a brief historical and critical account to each play. Their editorial work is of some value, but it is made up too frequently of digressions upon the noblemen to whom Crowne dedicated his plays. The only considerable scholarly investigation hitherto made is Wilhelm Grosse's monograph, *John Crownes Komödien und burleske Dichtung*, published in 1903. Grosse limited himself to the five extant comedies of Crowne and his two short burlesque poems, and gave only a sketchy account of his life.

My initial reason for undertaking a study of Crowne was the interest which attaches to his three years' residence in America and his attendance at Harvard College from 1657 to 1660. I also hoped to discover some new facts to add to the meagre record of his life, and in this attempt the results have not been entirely barren. Furthermore, no detailed study has ever been made of Crowne's tragedies, though he is as much a tragic poet as a comic dramatist. Accordingly, I have tried to show the relation between these two sides of his literary activity, and from the relation thus established to determine Crowne's true importance to the students of the drama. This lies chiefly, I think, in the fact that his work illustrates all the various types of drama in vogue in his time, and that, since he wrote primarily for a livelihood, his plays are better evidence of contemporary theatrical requirements than the work of men of greater genius. Incidentally I have endeavored to show that in his comedies Crowne is scarcely more moral than the majority of

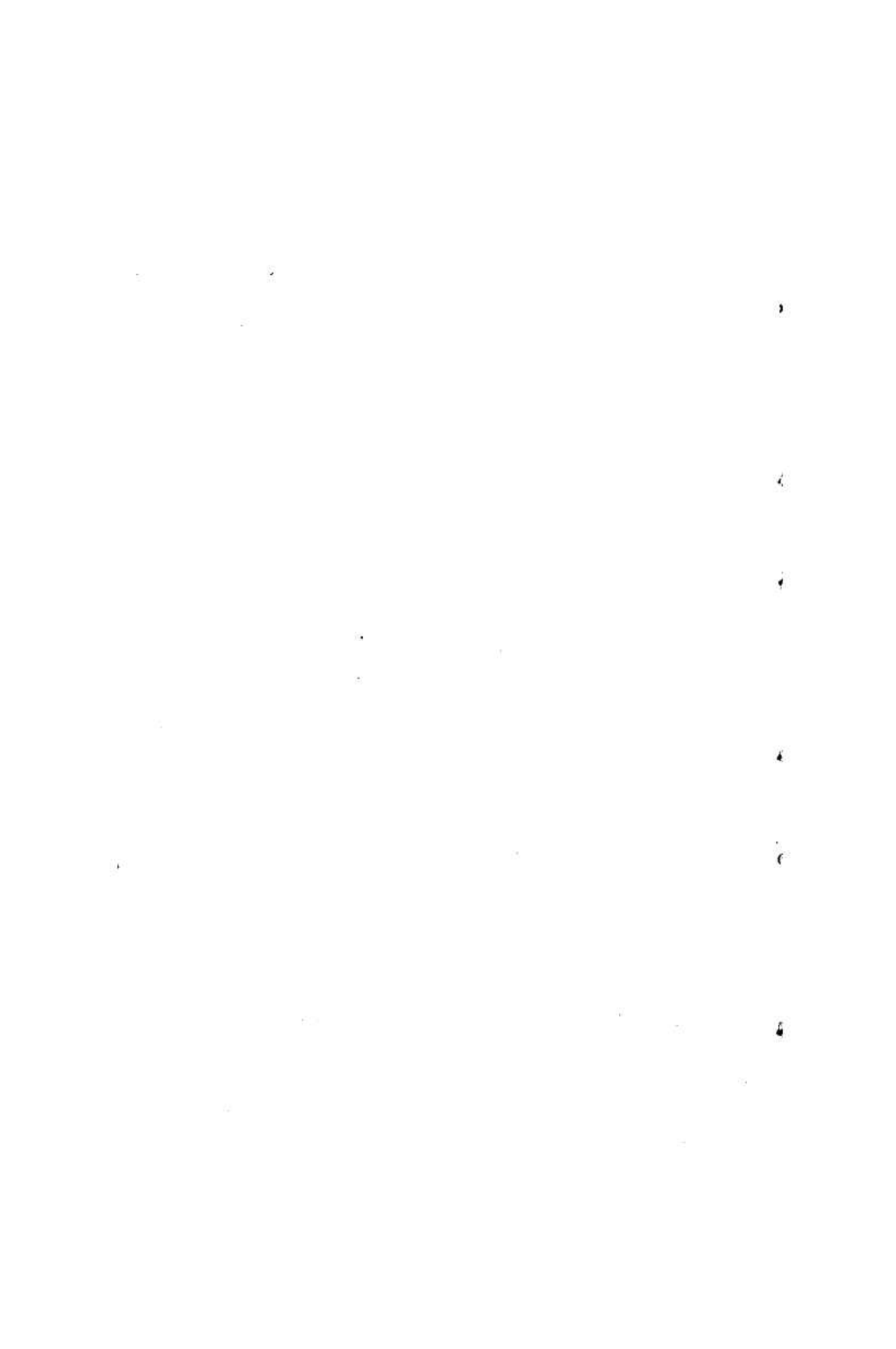
Restoration comic poets, and that therefore Grosse is mistaken in assuming that his significance in the history of English drama lies in the fact that he is a forerunner of Blackmore, Collier, and Steele in the struggle for more decency on the stage.

The present study consists of three parts. In the first I have endeavored to trace the life of Crowne more minutely than has hitherto been attempted. In the second I have treated of Crowne's plays in the order of their writing. Here it has been my purpose to discuss in connection with each play the date of production and publication, the circumstances connected with the writing, the sources, and the manner in which they are used. Finally, in the third part I have attempted a critical summary of Crowne's tragedies and comedies and an estimate of his importance as a playwright.

In the course of my investigations and in the preparation of this study I have received invaluable assistance for which I wish to express my appreciation. To many of my fellow students at Harvard from 1915 to 1918 I am indebted for references to out-of-the-way material. I owe my thanks also to Mr. William C. Lane, librarian of the Harvard University Library, and to his assistants for many favors extended to me. Dr. William H. Davis of Washington, D. C., and Mr. John H. Edmonds, curator of the Gay Collection in the Widener Library, have very kindly allowed me the use of material in their notebooks concerning the life of William Crowne. I am under obligation likewise to Mr. Albert Matthews of Boston for numerous suggestions, and to Mr. Julius H. Tuttle, acting librarian of the Massachusetts Historical Society for favors extended in the use of the Society's books. I wish to record here also my appreciation of the interest which Mr. Sidney S. Wilson, treasurer of Western Reserve University, has taken in the publication of this monograph, and the kindness of Professor W. H. Hulme of Western Reserve University in reading the proof and in making valuable suggestions. To Dr. William A. Neilson, under whom I began this study, my thanks are due for numerous suggestions in the early phases of my work. Finally, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Professor George L. Kittredge for the great patience and care with which he has read my manuscript and for the helpful and constructive criticism which he has given to me.

A. F. W.

Cleveland, May 17, 1922.



JOHN CROWNE
HIS LIFE AND DRAMATIC WORKS

CHAPTER I.

THE LIFE OF JOHN CROWNE.

The life of John Crowne is very obscure. First hand evidence for his boyhood, youth, and young manhood, if not entirely lacking, is limited to two or three documents. With regard to his father, however, we are more fortunate. Colonel William Crowne was a diligent public official during most of the stormy days of the commonwealth; and later, when he took possession of his estate in America, he became a person of note in New England. Thus we are able to trace his life in some detail for many years. Col. Crowne's career during the time of the Parliamentary government gives us a new approach to the early life of his son; with his subsequent purchase of a share in the province of Nova Scotia and with his emigration to the New World is associated our knowledge of the younger Crowne's education; and finally, the loss of that estate enables us to understand the son's choice of play-writing as a profession, and accounts for the bitterness which marks the closing years of his life. I have found it advisable, therefore, to present the life of Col. William Crowne at greater length than would be necessary, were our knowledge of his son accessible through any other channel.

I. THE PLAYWRIGHT'S FATHER.

Concerning William Crowne the father of John Crowne, the dramatist, John Dennis, the critic, made the following statement in a letter dated June 23, 1719, and published two years later in a collection entitled *Original Letters*: "Mr. Crown was bred under his Father, an Independent Minister in that part of Northern America, which is called Nova Scotia."¹ This misstatement was studiously copied by one biographer after another for one hundred and fifty years,² until A. H. Bullen in 1888, in his article on Crowne in the *Dictionary of National Biography* threw doubt upon it, since he found evidence from Colonial papers that William Crowne was

¹ John Dennis, *Original Letters, Familiar, Moral and Critical*, I, 48.

² Theophilus Cibber and others, *The Lives of the Poets*, III, 104; *Biographic Dramatica*, I, pt. I, 157; Sir Egerton Brydges, *Censura Litteraria*, Second Edition, VII, 143, Maidment and Logan, *The Dramatic Works of John Crowne*, I, ix-x.

a colonel in the English army.⁸ A year before, Dr. J. S. H. Fogg had stated in a paper on John Crowne, "I am sure that his father was not a dissenting minister, and equally sure that Maine, and not Nova Scotia, was his birth-place."⁹ Although the latter half of Dr. Fogg's statement is erroneous, he had documentary evidence of the fact that William Crowne was a colonel. Finally in 1891, Professor Archibald MacMechan, working apparently without knowledge of Dr. Fogg's published researches, discovered some documents in the archives of Nova Scotia which threw new light upon the elder Crowne's connection with America, and disproved once for all the statement of Dennis that he was an independent minister.⁵ Thus the matter remained until 1903, when Dr. William H. Davis published a short account of Colonel Crowne which added much to the known facts about him.⁶ I have been able to contribute a number of items of considerable interest as a result of my own researches.

William Crowne was born in England about 1617.⁷ Nothing is known of his extraction or of his education, but in 1636, in his nineteenth year, he was a member of the suite of Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, when that nobleman went as Charles I's ambassador extraordinary on a mission to the Emperor Ferdinand II. The party left England on April 6, 1636, and did not arrive again at London until December 27th following. In less than a month after the Earl's party had returned, the youthful William Crowne published a narrative of the embassy, entitled *A true relation of all the remarkable places and passages observed in the travels of Thomas, Lord Howard, earle of Arundell and Surrey, ambassadour extraordinary to Ferdinando II, 1636*. This little volume of seventy odd pages is for the most part a day-by-day account of the places through which the party passed, the dignitaries whom they met, and the sights of interest which they saw—all in a dry, journalistic vein. Our interest in it, however, is biographical rather than literary. It is dedicated "to the true and noble and my honourable master, Master Thomas Howard," the grandson of the Earl of

⁸ *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 1888, XIII, 243.

⁹ Dr. J. S. H. Fogg, *John Crowne—Dramatist and Poet*, *The Maine Historical and Genealogical Recorder*, IV, 189.

⁵ Archibald MacMechan, *John Crowne, a Biographical Note*, *Modern Language Notes*, VI, col. 277-285.

⁶ Wm. H. Davis, *Colonel William Crowne and his Family*, *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* LVII, 406-410.

⁷ In a deposition concerning some cattle, made in 1667, Wm. Crowne stated that he was about fifty years old. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, IV, 2.